

Different Ways to Say ‘No’ Politely

Although there are specific times when a firm NO is best, there are times and situations where we would like to say “no” in a more polite manner.

These times may include:

- Refusing an invitation from a family member, friend or colleague,
- Declining to take on extra work,
- Not wanting to start a new activity or experience,
- Declining a specific type of food or offer at a social gathering or party.

In these cases, there are three steps to saying “no” in a more polite manner:

Steps for Saying “No”

Steps	Statements
Start with a statement that shows you acknowledge their request and that you appreciate it.	It’s nice of you to offer but... Thanks for asking but... I’d love to, but...
Refuse.	No. No, sorry. No thanks. I can’t.
End with a statement that details your decision.	I’d rather... I’m not going to. I have plans to do (something) instead.
Suggest an alternative (if applicable).	Instead, can we... (propose alternative)? What about... (propose alternative)? Could we try... (propose alternative)?

Here are some examples to help you understand situations where you can say 'no' more politely:

Scenario 1: Anita and her Friends

Anita's friends are going to see a horror movie at the theater this weekend. Anita does not like horror and would prefer to go see a romantic comedy. Here's how Anita uses the strategies above to say no to her friends:

Friend 1: Hey Anita, we are going to see a movie this weekend. It's called Night of the Living Dead. You should totally come with us!

Anita: I don't think I can...

Friend 2: Are you scared?

Anita: It was really nice of you to invite me, but no, I can't go. I'd rather go see the movie Love Wins instead. Why don't you guys go see that movie this weekend and we can all go see Love Wins together next weekend?

Scenario 2: Dupal and the Volunteering Committee

Dupal is a regular volunteer at the homeless shelter in town. He often organizes events, such as food drives and fundraising initiatives on his own time. The manager of the centre is trying to persuade him to serve on a committee, which interferes with his other commitments.

Manager: Hi Dupal. We really could appreciate your assistance on the committee to help improve the homeless shelter. Are you available on Wednesday and Friday nights from 7 to 9 pm?

Dupal: Actually, I play hockey on those nights.

Manager: Dupal, your expertise is unparalleled. The committee is going to be a disaster without your leadership and expertise.

Dupal: Thanks for asking, but I can't do it. I've had these plans for a really long time. Instead, can I continue to do my current duties?

Scenario 3: Lisa and her Boss

Lisa is working on three projects simultaneously. Her boss is requesting she join a fourth project, as one of her colleagues recently quit. However, she is already overstretched on the projects she is committed to.

Boss: Lisa, I need you to take on this project. It's really important and you're the only one I trust to handle it.

Lisa: I'd love to help, but I can't. I'd rather focus on the projects that I'm currently working on. If you really need me on the project, instead, can you reduce the workload on my other assignments?

Activity

Now that you've seen some scenarios, try to think of some situations where you struggle to say no so you can practice formulating your answers to the questions.

What are some things you have trouble saying 'no' to? Make a list of them here:

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Using the guide above, formulate statements so you can say "no" politely to requests you do not want to accommodate:

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